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Abraham Lincoln's Contemporaries

Thomas T. Eckert

Excerpts from newspapers and other
sources

From the files of the
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

Anno Sept. 11, 1912.

the city's defense.

"How Does It Look Now?"

While dealing with the manifold calls upon him Lincoln was also obliged to grapple with the grave question of defending Washington and pushing on the army under General McClellan in pursuit of the enemy in Maryland.

In this labor he had no support of value from his general-in-chief, Gen. Henry W. Halleck, who was possessed with fears of an attack on Washington from Virginia—which the enemy had left behind them.

Harpers Ferry with its garrison of 10,000 men was threatened and General McClellan had made frequent appeals to Halleck for permission to withdraw its garrison before it was too late. General Halleck persisted that it be held and Lincoln, deferring to his judgment, could do nothing to aid it. It was cut off from communication with Washington and the ominous silence in its direction boded no good.

Since the Army of the Potomac had taken the field on the 7th, Lincoln had passed many anxious hours in the telegraph office and had sent many short, pithy messages of inquiry to the front.

One sent in the forenoon of September

ber 10 to General McClellan shows the closeness with which he was keeping in touch with the army. It was merely, "How does it look now?"

The reply was long, its substance being that the mass of the enemy was still in the vicinity of Frederick City (30 miles from Washington) that McClellan was pushing forward his right wing to verify their position and that he was busy refitting and reorganizing his army. No definite news of the enemy's intentions had developed, nor of his numbers, which General McClellan estimated at 120,000.

Helping Captain Eckert.

The relations of Lincoln and Captain Eckert were those of mutual regard. Eckert in the war, Captain Eckert had been accused by Secretary Stanton, on hearsay evidence, of neglecting his duty, withholding important dispatches from the secretary and permitting "leaks" of news to reporters.

Secretary Stanton therefore had made out an order for Eckert's dismissal and sent for Edward S. Sanford, president of the principal telegraph company of the time, to come from New York and take his place.

Sanford held Eckert in high esteem and told him how matters stood. Eckert at once wrote his resignation. This roused Secretary Stanton's anger.

Mr. Sanford went to the secretary's house to intercede for Eckert and obtained permission to bring Eckert to the secretary's office.

When they entered the secretary was standing at a tall desk writing. They stood for about 10 minutes before the secretary looked up, which he did to ask Eckert what he wanted.

Eckert defended himself, told how he had been at his post almost constantly day and night, and insisted that his resignation be accepted.

At this point Eckert felt an arm on his shoulder and turned to see that it

FIFTY years ago to-day President Lincoln was passing one of the most anxious days of his life, spending many hours in the telegraph office of the war department, seeking news of the progress of the Confederates in their invasion of the North.

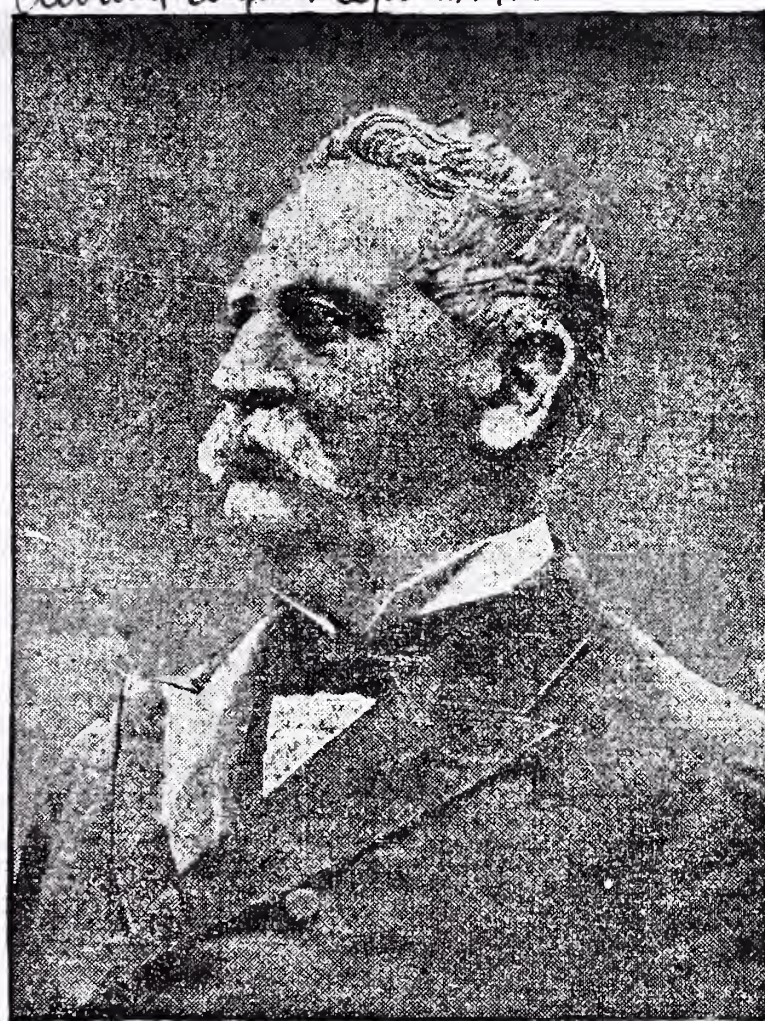
The burden of the conduct of the war, suddenly grown terribly heavy, rested almost wholly on his broad shoulders. Everybody turned to him for counsel. It was he who had to direct the vital movements of the Federal armies in the field. The Governors of Northern States that were threatened with invasion sent him long and urgent appeals for help. The mayors and citizens of threatened cities appealed for troops in numbers which, if supplied, would have decimated the forces in the field and left no obstacle to the Confederate advance.

Fifty years ago to-day the people of Cincinnati, alarmed at the Confederate operations in Kentucky, and of Harrisburg, Baltimore and Philadelphia, fearing the advance of Lee, were frantically appealing to the National Government—and that meant Lincoln—for help to repel the invaders from the South.

Lee's army was directing its march across Maryland toward the Pennsylvania line and on Sept. 11 had reached Hagerstown, a few miles from the border.

Governor Curtin, of Pennsylvania, appealed to Lincoln that day for permission to call out the militia of his State as part of the Federal army of defense, and the President gave him authority to do so. The Governor also appealed to the President for 80,000 troops to defend Philadelphia and for the services of one of the leading Federal generals to conduct

Albany Argus, Sept. 11, 1912.



MAJ. THOMAS T. ECKERT.

Chief of the War Department Telegraph Staff.

(From a Photo Taken Shortly Before His Death in 1910.)

was Lincoln's. The President at once took up Eckert's defense, assuring the secretary that he had often been at the office late at night and "several times before daylight," and that he had always found Eckert on duty.

Governor Brough, of Ohio, who had heard the conversation, now warmly greeted Eckert and spoke for him, saying he would vouch for anything he said.

Secretary Stanton was much impressed. Opening his desk he took out a packet of papers and selecting one handed it to Eckert, saying "Is that your resignation?" Eckert said it was. The war secretary then tore the paper up and dropped the pieces on the floor. He took up another paper, saying it was an order for Eckert's dismissal. This also he tore up. Then he said to Eckert:

"I owe you an apology. You are no longer captain, but Major Eckert."

From that time to the end of the war Major Eckert continued to do valuable service for the country, and to enjoy cordial relations with Lincoln.

